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AUTHOR Morgan, Frank
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ABSTRACT

"Using Television," a studio program in the Open University course "Making Sense of Society," was designed to increase student understanding of the nature of television material. The purpose of this critique is not so much to pass summary judgement on this particular program as to generate some formative ideas that might be used to improve the production and use of similar programs made in the future. Specific references to program details are included. (Author/RAO)

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FIRST OF ALL, SEE THE PROGRAMME

A critique of "Using Television" in the Social Sciences Course

Making Sense of Society

by

Frank Morgan

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FIRST OF ALL, SEE THE PROGRAMME

A critique of "Using Television" in the
Social Sciences Course

D101: Making Sense of Society

by

Frank Morgan

Part 1: INTRODUCTION

"Using Television" is a television programme in the Open University foundation course in Social Sciences (D101) Making Sense of Society. This critique is one part of an evaluation of the programme. The evaluation also includes a survey of students' responses, which I will report separately.

Primary Intention

The purpose of this evaluation is not so much to pass summary judgement on this particular programme as to generate some formative ideas that might be used to improve the production and use of similar programmes made in future. In the first instance therefore, my intended reader is someone involved in the planning or the production of television programmes: an academic course-team member or a BBC producer.

The Programme

"Using Television" is a studio programme, presented by *David Potter*. It incorporates excerpts from four other programmes in this series, and three "dramatized" sequences, all intended to increase the students' understanding of the nature of television material, and the ways in which it can be used in this course.

The programme could be described as "an illustrated lecture" or as a "news-type presentation". The presenter is the dominant figure on the screen, linking the various sequences and providing commentary on them. Principally through this presenter, the programme makes a number of propositions about the nature of television as an educational medium, and about its use in the study of social sciences.

Communication

Does writing in pleasure guarantee - guarantee me, the writer - my reader's pleasure. Not at all. I must seek out my reader (must "cruise" him) without knowing where he is (Barthes, 1975, 4)

I am aware of my remoteness from both producers and course-teams. Yet, I am also aware that they are engaged in communicating with a distant population of students, to teach them. So we share the task of communicating with a somewhat enigmatic audience.

I see communication not in the sense (derived from Aristotelian rhetoric) of "saying" some truth and conveying it to our audience or our reader per medium of our work. Nor is our work open to the Romantic interpretation of meaning whatever our audiences want it to mean. Rather, we communicate to the extent that we share in generating the meaning of this work Each of us brings to the task a variety of factors depending on our personalities, our experience, our professional, social and cultural affiliations. I put pen to paper to create the material form of this work, just as the television production team put together theirs. The meaning of the work depends upon the interaction of your ideas and mine with (and through) this material object.

Second Intention

---the text that discomforts, unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories; brings to a crisis his relation with language (Barthes, 1975,14)

My reader in the second instance is an evaluator of educational television programmes, other than a producer, a writer, or a teacher or student who uses television. Evaluating educational television,like all measurement, involves comparisons. And not all units of measure are as well-defined, as constant, as standardized as the metre. In many areas of educational and media research we are in the much more primitive situation in which the length of a foot depends on whose foot it is. In such a situation, measurement by comparison is as much a "measurement" of the "standard" foot as it is of anyone else's. Also in this essay, I am suggesting the addition of another measuring stick to the repertoire of measures and techniques used in evaluating educational television programmes. Perhaps it is a bit premature and extravagant to call it "measuring" other than in the restricted sense of checking or gauging. That you must judge.

Analysis of the simple, factual nature of the world invoked by a film is often bypassed. At the level of large groups of films - genre is a good example - this is very important...
(And as another point of focus) we are concerned with the information carried by formal techniques. This includes the full range of elements: speech, sound, music and (picture) image. Their formal combinations and permutations can... inform the spectator about the events and participants in a film (Tudor, 1974, 130)

Methodology

In evaluating "Using Television", I have attempted to bring to bear some viewpoints from the nascent sociology of the screen, together with some from aesthetics and communication theory, and something of what we know about teaching and learning. There is, I believe, widespread agreement (see also Tudor, 1974: Bates & Robinson, 1977) that, alongside more detailed empirical studies, we need also to be more conscious of the sort of images we are using and the models we are building.

I do not pretend that this exercise has much power, in the sense that we expect a generalizable theory to have it. I simply hope to demonstrate a method in a particular case. If it works here, and in enough other cases, it will establish itself.

(A text) produces, in me, the best pleasure if it manages to make itself heard indirectly; if, reading it, I am led to look up often, to listen to something else (Barthes, 1975, 24).

My evaluation of "Using Television" also included watching the programme being recorded in studio, talking to the producer and the writer-presenter, discussing it with students and tutors, and surveying (by questionnaire) students' responses to the programme. As I have said, that survey is reported separately. It cannot, of course, be considered separately, because I also wrote its questions. Granted, I discussed them with the production team and with my colleagues in the Media Research Group before the questionnaire was distributed. But that does not remove my finger-prints from the questions, or from their interpretation.

This essay is not just a description of the programme to help you make sense of the survey data: it is a self-contained critique. It will, I trust, help you make sense of the programme, and make sense of my evaluation of it. If phenomenology adds anything to our understanding of social reality, it is to remind us that our subjective perceptions and beliefs are (at least) as potent as any objective facts, in determining that reality. I am writing this critique before I deal with the survey data. In thus putting my ideas on record, I am contributing to the data. I am also declaring my hand in the game: the framework within which I will interpret the data.

One problem with media research is to describe what you have studied. One solution to this problem is to append scripts of the programme. A camera script indicates what the programme was meant to be like; a transcript what it was like as it went to air. The catch is that these documents can only indicate. They cannot look or sound like the actual programme. And to imagine what a programme is like - to "see" it and "hear" it - from words on a printed page is a subtle and acquired art. If, as Ebel (1976, 80) says, "previewing a film is a less-than-natural act for most professors", mastering this art is even more exotic. The only real solution is to start by looking at the programme itself, and looking so that we actually see. Then come the questions of what the producers intended, how the audience was meant to respond, and what actually happened.

Structure

The meaning of a film or a television programme is a function (very largely) of its formal structure. Meaning is created both within the separate sound and picture tracks, within particular shots, grabs (the analogous unit of sound), and sequences, and in the ways of those elements are juxtaposed with one another. I have tried likewise, in this critique, and in the whole evaluation, to generate meanings both through the various elements I have selected and through the form in which I have organised and presented them.

---we do not read everything with the same intensity of reading; a rhythm is established, casual, unconcerned with the integrity of the work; our very avidity for knowledge makes us skim or skip certain passages in order to get more quickly to the warmer parts...
..that further the solution of the riddle (Barthes, 1975, 10)

You will not read me word for word. And, as Barthes says, I cannot predict what you will not read, anymore than a television producer can predict what we will not watch, or a course-team can predict which of its components their students will neglect. Although I do know that monotony is deadly, and that there is pleasure in that very rhythm of what is read and what is not read. One measure of the great works of literature and of the screen is that they bear reading or viewing again. We don't skip the same parts twice running. And their richness lies in their having something new to discover each time. Even humbler works afford this pleasure to some degree, provided that their writers court their readers. So, I come a-wooing with this analysis and criticism of "Using Television".

The programme consists of a number of material elements, particular sounds and pictures, arranged according to the ideas of its producers. Its aim is to make us more able to use television in this social sciences course, to make us know more about the programmes, and to make us feel and act differently in relation to them. To take account of this interaction between material objects and subjective ideas, I have adopted an analytical framework derived from Popper's (1972) theory of worlds. This theory distinguishes between the world of material objects (world 1); the world of subjective ideas (world 2): and the world of structures produced by the action of ideas on material objects (world 3).

The material elements of the programme are examined first. Then its ideas are considered. Finally we turn to the structure of the programme, considering in particular the meaning generated through that structure. In simultaneous discussion I attempt to connect the points made about the structure of the programme to the wider debates about documentary film and television, communication, teaching and learning. Nowhere am I aware of providing a detached and objective representation.

---representation is when nothing emerges, when nothing leaps out of the frame: of the picture, the book, or the screen. (Barthes 1975, 57)

Part II: THE FABRIC OF THE PROGRAMME

"Using Television" is a studio presentation with film and videotape inserts, slides, captions, "dramatized" sequences performed in studio sets, a booth announcer, and a host presenter. No sound effects, recorded music or outside broadcast sequences (for instance) are included.

David Potter talks to camera in an eye-level medium shot, against a soft, pale green cyclorama. He links the film clips and videotape excerpts, performs in one of the "dramatizations" and talks over the other two (and some hardly legible captions).

David Potter talks in all for about 11½ minutes (46%) of the 25 minutes of the programme: three pieces each less than one minute, three of nearly two minutes, and one just over four minutes. He has an easy, cheerful manner on camera, His eyes twinkle, he smiles a lot: he looks relaxed. But his lines, and his tone of voice, are expository, didactic, authoritarian: really quite heavy.

His talk is interspersed with 13½ minutes (54%) of film and videotape - vox pop statements by some students and tutors, and extracts from four other programmes in this series. These sit like quotations, italicized or indented in a linear academic essay, or differently-intoned in a sermonic lecture. They are used as subordinate illustrations to the spoken message, rather than as main sources of the argument of the programme. For that we must take *David Potter's* words.

Terminology

David Potter is written in italics to help us to distinguish between the two David Potters associated with this programme: "David Potter the presenter" whom we see and hear, and "David Potter the writer" whom we do not. No convenient typographical device was available to make it immediately apparent that I am referring to "David Potter on the screen". Drawing oblong frames around the name was too laborious, and using some other verbal form (such as "the presenter") neglects the personal impression created by his screen appearance.

It also becomes cumbersome when a second presenter appears. So I chose the italics, and *"Potter" and "Brooman" and "Bloggs"* refer to those people on the screen.

Ideas Behind the Words

It is important to distinguish between "David Potter the presenter" and "David Potter the writer" for several reasons. We shall have to consider what David Potter does and says during the programme. And the question arises of whether those same things would have meant anything different had they been done or said by someone else, say *Bloggs* the newsreader/comedian/dramatic actor, or something else, say one of the Muppets cast in the role. We shall also have to consider what actually happened in the programme as opposed to what was meant to happen. Did David Potter the presenter perform as intended by David Potter the writer (and Graham Turner, the producer)? And finally this distinction helps to direct attention to the objective material nature of the programme.

When we watch this programme we see a face and a figure on the screen, and we hear a voice. These are the material elements of David Potter the presenter. Just as a spider's web consists solely of spun thread, this performance (and the whole programme) consists of no more than these material elements: its picture and sound tracks. *David Potter* is therefore just another of the artifacts at the disposal of David Potter the writer and Graham Turner the producer. The pattern of his performance is woven by the action of their ideas on these materials.

Their ideas also affect which other materials will be chosen, yet it is impossible to see the performance or the programme as "a mere expression" of the writer's and the producer's ideas. (Popper, 1972, 149). The materials affect the ways in which their ideas are expressed, and therefore also preclude any attempt to see those ideas as "a mere reflection" of the programme. In some instances the actual programme will not match the ideas intended by its producers, under the shadow which T.S. Eliot saw between thought and action. At others it will serendipitously exceed their best intentions.

One of the most striking things about television programmes (and the other inhabitants of Popper's world 3) is their autonomy and the objectivity of their existence. This programme has an objective existence clearly separable from (albeit intimately connected with) that of the television set on which it is watched and the videotape on which it is recorded. It is likewise distinct from David Potter's subjective ideas

and intentions. Once David commits his ideas to air and to tape, and I mine to paper, they become retrievable and accessible in a new way. Not only others, but we ourselves, can handle them differently, even make new discoveries in them. Like "the logical contents of books, libraries, computer memories and suchlike (they become part of) the world of objective knowledge" (Popper, 1972, 74)

The Ideas of the Programme

Either explicitly or implicitly, and generally verbally, *David Potter* proposes the following ideas during this programme:

1. television programmes can be useful in this course, particularly in helping you (students) to write TMA (tutor-marked-assignment) and examination answers, and also in helping you and your tutors focus tutorial discussion

2. television programmes extend the range of your experience in several ways -
   (i) "You may not have experienced unemployment yourself, but you have now been introduced to two people who have" (*9)
   (ii) "They provide illustrations of social life relevant to what you are learning in your units and set books" (*27)

3. television programmes are very memorable sources of information, and can also help you to reconstruct or regenerate that information at a later time.

4. television programmes can help you connect your everyday experience and language with that of social science, "a different level of discourse, full of concepts, theories and generalizations appropriate to a science" (*16)

5. television programmes can help you learn to deal with ephemeral information (*3) and with conflicting evidence (*27)

6. television programmes can be used to guide your performance of activities and exercises (other than tv viewing) (*20)

7. television itself is a language (or sign-system)
   "Pictures can provide very powerful messages in their own right" (*25)

8. television programmes (and the various elements within them) produce various types of response in their audiences, including stimulating their interest, reminding them of previous knowledge, and connecting new information with previous knowledge (*25, *28)

9. television is not a transparent medium, ingenuous and free from artifice, but requires its viewers (as well as its producers) to learn how to use it (*25 - 27)

Immediately after the titles, in shot (*2) *David Potter* tells us "this is a programme about using television in this course". Apparently afraid that we might go away, or otherwise turn off, he repeats emphatically "using television!" He seems to believe that we will be more interested in the use than in the television - a point to which I shall return later.

Whether the programme does actually prove the points listed above, and whether it does actually show people how to use television in this course, (or at all) are, I believe, moot points. It is sufficient to say that I believe it could have achieved its aims more fully, within the resources available. How it could have done so, I hope to show through this analysis.

The Structure of the Programme

The programme opens modestly but briskly. The titles are simple, mixed-case lettering on black: series title then programme title. The programme title "Using Television" is on one line across the centre of frame, about one-tenth screen-height. McLuhan (1964, 260) writes about the ways a typewriter "can shout or whistle or make funny faces". This lettering in the title has a very subdued voice. Nor does *David Potter* shout visually. We see him in medium shot, casual open shirt and warm brown jacket, looking us straight in the eye, smiling out of a soft pale green cyc. There is no theme music, certainly no fanfare. The producer's portents all suggest that using television is a very simple, straightforward, natural thing to do. This will be no "big deal".

Then *David Potter* speaks. In fifty seconds, he tells us what the programme is about, why it was made, and introduces a sequence of student's comments. They are new students, all beginning D101. They are "not too certain about the use of television in this course".

I had already wondered why *David Potter* had to tell us not to go away. Now I begin to wonder about this supposed uncertainty. To me, all these students appear to be quite certain. The genial dark-haired woman in blue (forty-odd? housewife? or schoolteacher? steady quiet voice) seems quite certain that these programmes are for information, not for entertainment. The man in the tie and blue epaulettes (policeman?) looks a bit tight-lipped (anxious?) but is no less certain that the programmes will need careful watching and probably some note-taking as they go. The other five too appear bright, intelligent, thoughtful. And quite sure, that there is some difference in being a "radio" person rather than a "television" person; that being taught is more difficult than relaxing and being frivolous; that they are out of practice as students; that television is a transient medium; that television can provide a common basis for tutorial discussion; that it can help people "key into issues"; that programmes need to be structured in particular ways to make them "informative in a directive way"; that there is some fundamental difference between information in literal, statistical and televised form.....

"Absolutely fascinating!" says *David Potter*, back in that gentle medium shot. I agree with him completely. He has struck oil. These commonsense responses to his (unstated, but clearly implied) question will need tapping and refining, but they have a very high potential energy. The students have all been shot in an intensely intimate big-close-up, against a violent red background. Their eyes and mouths have held the screen, and our attention. Their voices have been quiet, close, conversational. Coming back to *David* has let us out of that clinch, but has left our interest excited. Two and a half minutes in, and the programme is away and running. Now I expect *David* will start distilling the points in those comments some way or another. I assume that he has chosen them to introduce particular aspects of using television.

That "distinction" between information and entertainment, for instance. Perhaps he will show us an extract from one of the documentary/case-study programmes, to show that being informed can be highly entertaining. Why else do all those (at-least potential OU type) people watch *Kenneth Clarke, Bronowski, Melvyn Bragg,* and the plethora of "factual" programmes? Why else can Nicholas Garnham (1977) describe the documentary in all its diverse forms as "the quintessential aesthetic form" of British television? And perhaps *Potter* will show us how television producers construct their programmes to cope with the transiences of their medium: building spirals and loops, referring backwards and forwards within a programme, to keep their viewers interested and oriented.

David Potter tells us that the students have a mixed bag of expectations. He repeats that they are uncertain about using television. And when he suggests that we "get down to it", I expect that we are going to get down to making sense of those students' comments. Not so. "Here's the first part of the first TMA that 1977 students wrote about". The question is in very small lettering on a slide. Fortunately we hear it recited by a booth announcer. And in 10 seconds *David's* oil-well blows out. He has aroused us for a climax that is now lost. He diverts our attention to the TMA question:

(a) "Define" the three main types.....
explain the differences....
(b) Provide an illustration.....

Perhaps he is playing a "longer game". Perhaps this is not a diversion, but a feint. No. Immediately (and still in that medium shot) *David* gives us those definitions and explains those differences. Another white-on-black caption lists the three types. *David* tells us the rest, in just on 30 seconds and 100 words. Four minutes in, the programme has stumbled on a continuity break that amounts to a logical non-sequitur, and now has had a premature blow-out.

A question has been put and answered. It has lost its power to hold and abrade our curiosity (see Bruner, 1963: Berlyne 1974). And ironically, in a programme promoting the use of television, it has been spiked verbally. Yet for the next 5 minutes we have an extract from the programme "Unemployment" (D101/TV1) ostensibly to show how that programme would help us answer that TMA question.

The pity is that the extract might indeed have helped us answer "(b) Provide an illustration...". The link into the extract however directs our attention away from that part of the question to the problems of defining and explaining. By answering part (a) so completely verbally, *David* creates the impression of having dealt with them both, and leaves the potentially promising (b) prematurely spent. And the point of our watching is most uncertain as we go into the extract.

It is another 2 minutes after the extract before *David* finishes his discussion of the TMA questions on unemployment. The remainder of the programme sees extracts from three other programmes in the series, followed by *David's* comments; a sequence in which he dons different costumes to remind us of the power of television pictures to "provide powerful messages in their own right"; a sequence

in which a woman enacts the writing of TMA and exam answers, to remind us how television can assist recollection; and a sequence of tutors' comments about how they (do or might) use television in their tutorials. I shall return to these later parts of the programme, but for the moment I want to concentrate on the first 11 minutes which seem to me to demonstrate several important points, both of pedagogy and of television production.

"Using Television" in its opening shot, is established as an exhortatory programme with *David Potter* as the authority figure. And for four minutes it maintains that style, continuity bumps notwithstanding. Then the scene is stolen by the extract from "Unemployment", a programme of the same style as "Using Television", in which *Derick Brooman* tells us about unemployment. In the absence of any voice-overs from *David Potter*, or any cutting back to him, to remind us that he is still the authority, the extract is allowed to upstage the programme. Pedagogically, such voice-overs or cut-aways would also remind us of why we are watching the extract and of *Brooman's* relationship with the concepts of unemployment and the people being depicted in that programme (an important point in recognising the types of tv programme used in this course). As it is, we are allowed to forget *David* and skate past these other points. At the end of 11 minutes *Brooman* and unemployment have beaten *Potter* and using television. They win on points by 7 to 4, or more (given the perspective effect by which our memories foreshorten the more distant past in comparison with more recent time). And when we do come back to *David* our confusion is compounded by his next line: "Now back to the.... unemployment". *Potter* has defected to the winning side of *Brooman* and unemployment, and has left using television to go down alone. His subsequent repetition of the TMA question and his assurance that we are now better placed to answer it hardly retrieve the position. Certainly we have an answer for the TMA. But we have it from what *David Potter* said earlier, not from what he showed us in the extract.

The same problem recurs later in the programme when we are shown an extract from the programme D101/TV2 "Crime". This is supposed to help us summarise an article on "The Labelling Approach" (to the study of crime) by Vincent Worth. Summarisation however is a literary exercise of analysis and precis-writing. By definition it excludes reference to, or the introduction of, external material. And, into the bargain, the article makes no reference to the television programme.

Sadly, in both of these cases, such extracts could have been used to make the points which were intended, and some of the others which *David Potter* asserts verbally elsewhere in the programme (listed above under The Ideas of the Programme). Had we been shown shorter clips of each of the unemployed men, and been asked to compare their accounts, we could have been expected to recognise that one was only briefly unemployed, and the other apparently permanently so. Another pair of clips could have shown that one man had found a job to match his skills, location and preferences, and the other had not. And so on. The various concepts (types of unemployment) could have been built up attribute by attribute. Then to show a more extended extract from "Unemployment" would have rehearsed us in the skills of recognising and sorting those attributes "on the run". Admittedly this would be explicit and convergent instruction, and some would argue that university education should involve less of that and more "open-ended" learning of principles and solving of problems (Gagne, 1974). My suggestion would, however, demand a higher order of intellectual activity than the rote recall required to remember a verbal answer. It would also go further towards *David Potter's* declared aims of connecting everyday experience with the language of social science, and of teaching us to deal with ephemeral evidence.

Had *David Potter* then examined the ways in which "Unemployment" was shot and edited, and the role played in that programme by *Derick Brooman*,he could further have made his points about the power of television pictures, about the handling of conflicting evidence, and (thereby) about the usefulness of television in this course. He might even have examined "Unemployment" in terms of labelling theory.

Later in the programme, *David* points out some of the factors which affect the meanings and values expressed in them. Similar factors apply to sound tracks too. The sequence in which *David* pops magically out of his casual gear and pale green limbo into academic regalia and an opulent library set, and on into denims, pin-ball parlour and a hip accent, without missing a beat (let alone a word) of his speech, is very striking and very neatly performed. It is also a neat piece of videotape editing. It works very well in "hooking" us. It is also a new and valuable thought. However, once hooked we are left dangling. No connection is made with actual cases, in which these factors apply much more subtly. I have already discussed the ways in which this programme was shot and edited. Consider the ways in which "Unemployment" depicts *Hunt, Lockyer* and *Brooman:* that opening high-angle

wideshot of *Dave Hunt* a small figure "down there" low in the frame, among the council flats of Sunderland; *Hunt* being interviewed, still shot from above eye-level; the immediate ascendancy of *Brooman*, sitting solidly high in centre frame, when we cut back to him; the low-angle close-ups of *Lockyer* (under the cloud of losing one job) cut against a panning shot of the fields on which metaphorically (his voice-over muses) he might be put out to pasture. Consider the ways in which *Buller* was shot and cut in "Crime". There is no shortage of significant examples.

Discussion Break

Television producers conjure meanings and values out of material elements such as form, size, colour, line, texture and movement (in the picture track) and analogous elements in the sound track. Their audiences conjure theirs from the raw material of what they see on the screen and hear from the speaker-box, irrespective of whether they are to be titillated, told, or taught. Both parties bring to the process certain expectations and certain intentions. Hence the "co-ordination" problems so well laid out by Novitz (1977, 32). The producer cannot decide unilaterally to use <u>any</u> particular device, but has to "second-guess" the expectations of the audience. The producer's decision therefore is based on a knowledge of the available devices (past and present) and of the audience's likely expectations and responses to them.

Novitz (1977, 43) provides another useful point for this discussion. He introduces the notion of "intention" and shows that to grasp the full force of an utterance we have to recognise the intention of its author. This intention is complex. The author (here the producer) intends (a) to produce a certain cognitive response in the audience, and (b) that the audience should recognise that this is his intention. This I assume distinguishes the professor from the propogandist hidden persuader. Novitz points out that this has to be done "within the work", using the same elements with which the work is created. So the configuration of elements within a picture tells us, at once, <u>that</u> it is a picture, <u>what</u> it is a picture of, and <u>why</u> it has been pictured. And as a warning of the power of these configurations, Novitz quotes Strawson: "In the absence of appropriate intention, forms can take charge". I guess this is what *David Potter* means when he says: "Pictures provide very powerful messages in their own right".

Pictures are used to warn, to explain, to entice, to entertain, and so on, in general service broadcasting. In this university we are concerned with their capacity to teach, or at least to assist learning. A number of theorists have examined the smaller scale activities involved in teaching. Gagne (1974) for

instance points out that all instruction involves gaining and maintaining attention; recalling previous knowledge; guiding the learner's thought and activity; informing the learner of his progress; ensuring that his new knowledge is reinforced, remembered, connected with his previous knowledge, and made available for transfer or application; and finally assessment. Connecting such an analysis of instructional intention with that of the material elements of television programmes (or any other educational media) leads to a new perspective on the phrase "the use of television in this course". It also reinforces what *David* says about the power of pictures. The arrangement of the elements within each programme, and within each segment of a programme, will tell us what the programme or segment is about and what its instructional function is, far more powerfully than will broadcast notes, or captions, or even presenter's comments. Novitz (1977, 68) says that you cannot use "a picture of Queen Victoria on horseback to illustrate Alice's tea-party".

That is true. But you can put the two together. And in doing so, you generate a new meaning, which I leave you to consider. As I leave you to consider the effect of *David Potter* saying "these (visual devices) are tricks and we don't use them in this course" when the pictures themselves suggest that we do.

The foregoing discussion has, I trust, made clear why I challenge the logic of the statement in shot 9: "You may not have experienced unemployment but you have now been introduced to two people who have". In the context of the programme this is made to suggest that if only television could give us touch, taste and smell; if only we could meet these men in the flesh; if only we could be unemployed ourselves - then we should "understand" unemployment more fully and answer our TMA etc more successfully. I trust that it is clear why I doubt that we would necessarily (or even probably) be any more able to define types, explain differences, etc in those circumstances. Do unemployed students perform any better than the rest on that question, I wonder? This is particularly ironic in a course entitled Making Sense of Society, in which making sense of experience means fitting it into theoretical frameworks.

It also represents a fairly naive belief in the "objective realism" of documentary or factual films and television programmes. Again, I trust I have already made my arguments against that point of view. They are made elsewhere by Metz (1974) Garnham (1977), and Rosenthal (1972). It is also interesting to note that Frederick Wiseman, whose documentaries *Titticut Follies*,

High School, Juvenile Court, Welfare, and so on, have achieved some impact and recognition for their overwhelming "realism", describes his own work as "reality fictions" (Atkins, 1976). Also relevant is the debate in Britain in early 1978 surrounding the Allen/Loach/Garnett television series *Law and Order,* another "drama-documentary after the style of *Cathy Come Home, Days of Hope,* etc.

The Programme: Part 2

However, back to "Using Television". At the 11-minute point, *David Potter* concludes his discussion of unemployment and that TMA question. In the remaining 14 minutes he shows us excerpts from three more programmes; he dramatizes points about the nature of television material and how students use it; he introduces some filmed comments by tutors; and finally he warns us against expecting to be pleased too often. The pace at least quickens in the run home.

The first of the three excerpts is from "Crime", the second programme in the series. *David Potter's* link into the film describes the labelling approach to the definition of criminality. Then we see *Buller*, the sometime villain. He is shot in big-close up from just below eye-level. We might be sitting on a hassock by his knee to hear his tale. Safe behind amber glasses, his eyes squint a little as he recalls the past. His voice is quiet, tobacco-husked. He delivers his soliloquy:...in a club once...bit of trouble started...this man crept up and stuck him with a knife... (he winces slightly at the memory)... *Buller* gave him a hiding, though only with the fist. The impression is of psychoanalysis. The anonymous interviewer(cum analyst) gently asks: "When did you first get involved in crime?" His first memory is of his mother saying: "go on...". It is strong, impelling material. And when the shot widens we see some of the wages of crime: the stereo amplifier, the alabaster Renaissance figures, the lamps, the burgundy velvet chair-covers.

I wondered why we were shown this excerpt. As I have already demonstrated, it bears no necessary connection with the TMA question with which *David Potter* tries to connect it. Going back to the original programme I found that it differed from "Unemployment" in production style. "Crime" had no authority-figure presenter. It was much more the "slice-of-life" type documentary with an apparently unobtrusive reporter asking questions in shot, delivering omniscient "god-voice" commentaries out of shot. In a programme on the use of television, it provides a rich example of material that demands sophisticated and sceptical handling. Look at the way *Buller* is depicted. What is the effect of that big candid close-up?

What if he had been shot in full frontal medium shot, like a prison mug-shot? Echoes of the interrogation room? Was "*Buller*"ever a con-man, do you think? The possibilities were numerous. Instead, we have again been aroused and let down.

There follows a sequence in which *David Potter*, in medium shot again, tells us how much more fortunate we are than university students all over the world who have to learn only from books. We have television to connect the new discourse of the social sciences with the language and experience we already know. This "power to connect" will be especially evident in the television programmes about the concept of work. However the TMA question, when it comes up on a caption, asks us to discuss our attitudes to our <u>own</u> jobs. Again this has nothing to do with what we see of the television programmes offered in the course.

"So far I've been talking about one type of programme" says *David Potter*. But there are others, such as those requiring some linked or simultaneous activity. We are shown a very brief excerpt from a programme on Hockett's Design Features in human communication. *Buller's* personal analyst returns to the screen to invite us to mark in our books the appropriate feature present in typewriting. The typewriter, mimicking the hard-copy printer of a computer, chugs out the options in a big close-up:

Rapid fading?
Learnability?
Openness?
Reflexiveness?

Then the rapid-fading feature of television is immediately demonstrated as *David Potter* tells us about programmes in which eminent academics speak about their areas of expertise, and people of political importance discuss public issues. Where, I wonder, does this fit into the typology? There are programmes which require me to watch and listen, some which require me to write in my workbook. Where do these new ones fit?

Joseph Alioto, Mayor of San Francisco, does an impersonation of a less-gross, more-polite, middle-class Kojak. He is shot fairly tight in a medium shot that shows his desk top, and a flag squeezed between the back of his chair and the office wall. There is a panel of venetian blinds in the right of the picture. If not actually a cramped picture, it is hardly spacious, and certainly not "splendid" as *David Potter* will insist later. Alioto is talking about people's attitudes to open space and town planning. We cut to a street scene, pan, and tilt up the front of a tall purple building. "If people go up thirty-two stories...you have to leave half your lot on open space, "says the Mayor, voice-over.

David Potter tells us that other people interviewed in that programme disagreed with the mayor, and that this leads him to warn us about television. We should not be "bamboozled" into believing that these programmes are telling the truth. Pictures can provide very powerful messages, and we should beware of believing what we see. He refers back to Alioto in his "splendid" office, and goes on to demonstrate how costumes and sets affect the plausibility of players on the screen.

The reference back to Alioto exemplifies a problem well-known by film and television directors: that of what the pictures actually show, as compared with what they were meant to show. As a rule a film editor will not go on location to see the film shot. He will see it first when it comes to him as shot rushes, and will view it free from preconception. Part of his job at that viewing is to look for meanings. What does each shot sequence say? Then the director tells him what it was meant to mean, and they set about trying to reconstruct that reality, or perhaps another suggested by that viewing and discussion. Alioto's office may well be splendid. I don't know; I've never seen it. *"Alioto's office"* as seen here is not.

I have already discussed the next segment of the programme, where *David Potter* demonstrates the effects of costume and setting on the meaning of a picture. I have also argued that these factors are used much more subtly in actual cases. More could have been made of that point. We could for instance have gone back to *Brooman, Hunt, and Lockyer* in "Unemployment" to see what costumes and settings added to the meaning of what we saw in them. Two equally powerful and intimately related factors are the choices made of camera angles and perspectives. In the academic library scene there is a zoom in to *David Potter*. The picture changes from "a room with a man in it" to "a man in a room". Sadly these chances are all let go and *David Potter* instead makes the righteous (but erroneous) claim that "these are tricks and we don't use them in this course". They are the stock-in-trade devices of the television producer, and programmes cannot be made without them. Cameras have to be put somewhere. Lenses of some focal length have to be chosen. Those decisions are comparable to the decision a course team might take to write a course unit in the first person or the third person, with its connotation about the authority of the unit. They have to be taken and they are significant in the absolute sense that they signify meaning.

The sadness becomes ironic when *David Potter* goes on to talk about the skills and attitudes required of a student of the social sciences, and of their particular need to cope with conflicting evidence; to avoid unfounded generalizations. His assertions that television programmes can provide a stimulus for study and can assist in improving our comprehension are true enough, although they smack vaguely of testimonials for toothpaste, or party political broadcasts. The real problem is that they are not borne out by the rest of the programmes, and we are faced with conflicting evidence. Furthermore, it is hard to see how to resolve that conflict without disadvantage to *David*. If the pictures are as powerful as he says, how can we accept what he has said and done to the contrary (or in neglect of that "fact"). If they are not, then why did he say it?

With 21 minutes gone, *David Potter* sums up. We see a woman in a bed-sitting-room set, at a desk covered in books and papers, pen in hand, awaiting inspiration. *David*, voice-over, assures us that whenever we write a TMA essay, whenever we need an illustration or example to prove that we know what we are writing about... television can be useful. It's the same in the final exam. Except that we're alone and our need is more urgent. Again, the same woman looks for inspiration. Suddenly the revelation comes. The great voice speaks unto her and says "Write what thou seest...". And she's away.

Finally *David Potter* reminds us that television can be useful in tutorials and introduces some filmed tutors to tell us directly. They appear in the same shot, and against the same red wall, as the students whom we saw at the beginning of the programme. I am reminded how much students and tutors look alike, and sound alike. The first tutor says that we are not used to thinking about the television we watch. She thinks tutors need to help us over that hurdle. The second tutor gives us a ringside description of how he runs his tutorials including a passing reference to a television programme. The third thinks we need to be taught how to use television, how to accept that programme styles vary, how to take notes during programmes. "One has to get used to using television in a very specialized way".

Nobody has actually told me, let alone shown me, what television adds to a tutorial. However, *David* reminds me to heed what the last tutor says: "practice taking notes, and read the broadcast notes...". He warns us that some will be less helpful than others. We will like some programmes less than others. That can't be helped. They can't please all of us all of the time. We cut to black. The credits come up. The programme is over.

Part III: AFTER THE PROGRAMME

My attempts to recollect and organise the points made in this programme, were disturbed by the reverberating clang of *David Potter's* closing line. However, checking them off, he said something about television and the answers to TMAs, he showed me samples of the programmes in the series, he warned me not to trust a television picture, and...

I am luckier than the students who had to watch this programme. I have seen the draft and camera scripts. I saw the programme recorded in studio. And instead of having only one second chance to see it, I have it recorded on videotape to replay at will. I am also much more familiar with television as a medium and as teaching material. Yet I found it very hard to make a coherent summary of the points made in the programme from my first viewing. And to write this analysis I had to replay it many times subsequently to check points of detail.

There are no broadcast notes to refer to, although again I am fortunate in being able to talk to the writer and the producer. I can ask them about their intentions in particular parts of the programme.

There is a popular opinion that television is a rather crude medium, that it is culturally infra dig on the one hand and technically coarse on the other. There are only five or six hundred lines of information on the screen and so the pictorial resolution is nowhere near as fine as on the big screen of a cinema showing 35mm films. Epistemically and aesthetically too television is seen to lack discriminating power. It is supposedly prone to stereotyped characterization, to eclecticism in argument, and to partiality of observation. Time is another constraint against the presentation of refined, articulate arguments on the screen. Programmes time-slots are too short, and time itself bears the programme away.

In this critique I have tried to show that television is in fact much more richly and subtly textured that this opinion holds. Also there are devices and techniques for gaining and maintaining the attention of viewers, for recalling what they have already seen and heard, for foreshadowing what is to come, for guiding the viewers' perception of material, and so on.

These activities closely parallel those involved in learning. They provide a link between the entertaining power (as distinct from the diverting power) and the educational power of a programme. Had the production team on this programme paid more attention to these devices and techniques they would have come closer to their stated aim.

Part IV: CONCLUSION

"Using Television" makes a number of important propositions about the nature of television as an educational medium, and about its use in this foundation course in social science.

These points are put principally in the words spoken by the presenter. There is some dissonance between this speech and the pictures and other sounds of the programme, and this disonance weakens the programme both "as television" and "as educational material".

The programme would have been stronger in both these respects had it been constructed more in the style of a problem which embodied its own solution. This could have been done by paying more attention to the actual material elements of the excerpts selected, and by adopting an interrogatory rather than an expository posture. This would have involved the curiosity of the audience to a greater degree. It would have made more use of their previous knowledge. It would have required their more active intellectual involvement in the programme.

Analysis of this programme further suggests that dependence on broadcast notes, or even upon an introductory programme on "Using Television", is not as likely to produce the type of television usage desired in this course, as is the production of programmes which within themselves each indicate the intentions of their producers (i.e. the course team).

These intentions which must be taken into account, are educational intentions, such as stimulating interest, recalling previous knowledge, organising students' thinking and activity, informing them of their progress, or ensuring that they connect their new knowledge with what they have already.

Analysis of this programme also knows that television material is much richer in potential learning experience than some course teams have recognised. Differently used by them it need not be subordinate to course units and set books. Indeed the attempt to make it subordinate will often cause a destructive dissonance. Again, the solution lies in examining the work itself. What does each component (television programme, course unit, etc) "say" through its material elements? - as opposed to assuming that it "says" what it was "meant" to say.

As users of television in our courses, our evaluation of each programme will depend on what it means, on what sense we can make of it. And that depends on how the material elements of the programme are put together. The technical skills involved are those of the director and the teacher, as much as those of the cameraman, the sound engineer, the graphic designer or the vision-mixer. The art of producing educational television programmes lies in bringing all of their techniques to bear. And that is what determines what we see when we look at a programme.

Frank Morgan
Visiting Research Fellow
Audio-Visual Media Research Group

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